

Biography vol. 7.

A

LETTER
TO
ADAM SMITH LL.D. K
ON THE
LIFE, DEATH, AND PHILOSOPHY
OF HIS FRIEND
DAVID HUME Esq.

By one of the People called CHRISTIANS.

*Ibant obscuri, solâ sub nocte, per umbram,
Perque domos Ditis vacuas, et inania regna.*

VIRG.

D. Rov

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A D V E R T I S E M E N T.

IT is of no consequence, gentle Reader, to you, any more than it is to DR. SMITH, that you should know the name of the person, who now addresseth you. Your mind cannot be biased, either way, by that, of which you remain ignorant. The remarks in the following pages are not therefore true, or false, because I publish them, but I publish them, because I think them to be true. Read, consider, and determine for yourself. If you find no satisfaction, throw the book into the fire; regret (but with moderation, as becometh a philosopher) the loss of your shilling; and take care not to lose another,

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in the same manner. If, on the contrary, you *should* find satisfaction (and, it is humbly hoped, you will find a great deal) neglect not to communicate to others, what has thus been communicated to you. Speak handsomely of me, wherever you go, and introduce me to your kinsfolk and acquaintance. The enemies of Religion are awake; let not her friends sleep.

I intended a much longer work; but, like the learned editor of Mr. HUME's Life, am necessitated to "gratify," with all possible expedition, "the impatience of the "public curiosity;" so eager is it to hear, what they, who believe in GOD, can possibly have to say for themselves. And if this will do the business, why should you

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be troubled with more? I am far from agreeing with Mr. VOLTAIRE, in all his observations. But there is one, in which it is impossible to disagree with him. "I have said, and I abide by it," cries the little hero, "that the fault of most books is, their being too large." On reviewing what I have written, I really cannot see there is occasion to add another sentence.

Had I not chosen, for reasons best known to myself, thus to make my appearance *incog.* I would certainly have fate for my picture, and have tried to cast a look at my title page, as lively and good humoured, as that of Mr. HUME himself. My bookseller, indeed, told me, it would

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have been a much more creditable way of doing the thing ;
“ and then, you know, Sir,”
said he, “ we could have charged
“ the other sixpence.”

A LET-

A

L E T T E R, &c.

SIR,

YOU have been lately employed in embalming a philosopher; his *body*, I believe I must say; for concerning the other part of him, neither you nor he seem to have entertained an idea, sleeping or waking. Else, it surely might have claimed a little of your care and attention; and one would think, the belief of the soul's existence and immortality could do no harm, if it did no good, in a *Theory of Moral Sentiments*. But every gentleman understands his own business best.

B

Will you do an unknown correspondent the honour, Sir, to accept a few plain remarks, in a free and easy way, upon the curious letter to Mr. STRAHAN, in which this ever memorable operation of *embalming* is performed? Our Philosopher's account of *his own life* will likewise be considered, as we go along.

Trust me, good Doctor, I am no bigot, enthusiast, or enemy to human learning—*Et ego in Arcadiâ*—I have made many a hearty meal, in private, upon CICERO and VIRGIL, as well as Mr. HUME*. Few persons (though, perhaps, as Mr. HUME says, upon a like occasion, “I ought not “to judge on that subject”) have a quicker relish for the productions of genius, and the beauties of composi-

* LIFE, p. 5.

tion. It is therefore as little in my intention, as it is in my power, to prejudice the literary character of your friend. From some of his writings I have received great pleasure, and have ever esteemed his History of England to have been a noble effort of *Matter and Motion*. But when a man takes it into his head to do mischief, you must be sensible, Sir, the Public has always reason to lament his being *a clever fellow*.

I hope it will not be deemed vanity in me likewise to say, that I have in my composition a large portion of that, which our inimitable SHAKESPEARE styles, *the milk of human kindness*. I never knew what envy or hatred was; and am ready, at all times, to praise, wherever I can do it, in honour and conscience. DAVID, I

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doubt not, was, as you affirm, a social agreeable person, of a convivial turn, told a good story, and played well at "his favourite game of whist*."

I know not that JOHN THE PAINTER did the same. But there is no absurdity in the supposition. If he did not, he might have done it—Doctor, be not offended—I mean no harm. I would only infer thus much, that I could not, on that account, bring myself absolutely to approve his odd fancy of firing all the dock-yards in the kingdom.

Concerning the *philosophical opinions* of Mr. HUME you observe †, that "men will, no doubt, judge variously." They are certainly at liberty so to do, because the author himself did the same. Sometimes, to

* LIFE, &c. p. 43. † LIFE, &c. p. 59.

be sure he esteemed them ingenious, deep, subtile, elegant, and calculated to diffuse his literary fame to the ends of the world. But, at other times, he judged very differently ; very much so, indeed. “ I dine, says he, I play a “ game at back-gammon, I converse, “ and am merry with my friends ; and “ when, after three or four hours “ amusement, I would return to these “ speculatious, they appear so *cold*, “ so *strained*, and so *ridiculous*, that I “ cannot find in my heart to enter “ into them any farther.”* Now, Sir, if you will only give me leave to judge, before dinner, of Mr. HUME’s philosophy, as he judged of

* *Treatise of Human Nature.* I. 467. In the Postscript to this Letter, a view will be exhibited of the HUMIAN system, taken exactly as it appeared to it’s author at six o’clock in the evening.

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it after dinner, we shall have no farther dispute upon that subject. I could indeed wish, if it were possible, to have a scheme of thought, which would bear contemplating, at any time of the day ; because, otherwise, a person must be at the expense of maintaining a brace of these metaphysical Hobby-Horses, one to mount in the morning, and the other in the afternoon.

After all, Sir, friend as I am to freedom of opinion (and no one living can be more so) I am rather sorry, methinks, that men should judge so *variously* of Mr. HUME's philosophical speculations. For since the design of them is to banish out of the world every idea of truth and comfort, salvation and immortality, a future state, and the providence, and even exist-

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ence of GOD, it seems a pity, that we cannot be all of a mind about them, though we might have formerly liked to hear the author crack a joke, over a bottle, in his life time. And I could have been well pleased to have been informed by you, Sir, that before his death, he had ceased to number among his happy effusions tracts of this kind and tendency.

For—(let me come a little closer to you, Doctor, if you please, upon this subject—Don't be under any apprehensions—my name does not begin with a B—) Are *you* sure, and can you make *us* sure, that there really exist no such things as a GOD, and a future state of rewards and punishments? If so, all is well. Let us *then*, in our last hours, read LUCIAN, and play at WHIST, and droll upon CHA-

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RON and his boat*; let us die as foolish and insensible, as much like our brother philosophers, the calves of the field, and the asses of the desert, as we can, for the life of us. But—if such things BE—as they most certainly ARE—Is it right in you, Sir, to hold up to our view, as “perfectly “wise and virtuous”†, the *character* and *conduct* of one, who seems to have been possessed with an incurable antipathy to all that is called RELIGION; and who strained every nerve to explode, suppress and extirpate the spirit of it among men, that it’s very name, if he could effect it, might no more be had in remembrance? Are we, do you imagine, to be reconciled to a character of this sort, and fall in love with it, because it’s owner was

* LIFE, &c. p. 47, et seq.

† LIFE, &c. p. 62.

good company, and knew how to manage his *cards*? Low as the age is fallen, I will venture to hope, it has grace enough yet left, to resent such usage as this.

You endeavour to entertain us with some *pleasant conceits* that were supposed by Mr. HUME to pass between himself and old CHARON. The philosopher tells the old gentleman, that, “ he had been endeavouring to open “ the eyes of the Public ;” that he was “ correcting his works for a new “ edition,” from which great things were to be expected ; in short, “ if “ he could but live a few years longer (and that was the only reason “ why he would wish to do so) he “ might have the satisfaction of seeing “ the downfal of some of the prevailing systems of *superstition.* * ”

* LIFE, &c. p. 50.

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We all know, Sir, what the word **SUPERSTITION** denotes, in Mr. **HUME**'s vocabulary, and against what Religion his shafts are levelled, under that name. But, Doctor **SMITH**, do you believe, or would you have us to believe, that it is **CHARON**, who calls us out of the world, at the appointed time? Doth not **HE** call us out of it, who sent us into it? Let me, then, present you with a paraphrase of the Wish, as addressed to **HIM**, to whom it should, and to whom alone, with any sense and propriety, it can be addressed.—Thus it runs—

“ **LORD**, I have only one reason
“ why I would wish to live. Suffer
“ me so to do, I most humbly be-
“ seech thee, yet a little while, till
“ mine eyes shall behold the success
“ of my undertaking to overthrow,
“ by my metaphysics, the faith which

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“ thy son descended from heaven
“ to plant, and to root out the know-
“ ledge and the love of thee from the
“ earth.”

Here are no rhetorical figures, no hyperboles or exaggerations. The matter is even so. I appeal, in the face of the world, Sir, to yourself, and to every man, who can read and understand the writings of Mr. HUME, whether this be not, in plain, honest English, the drift of his *philosophy* as it is called; for the propagation of which alone he wished to live; and concerning which you are pleased to say coolly, “ men will judge variously, “ every one approving or condemning “ these opinions, according as they “ happened to coincide, or disagree “ with his own *.” Our thoughts are very naturally carried back, upon this

* LIFE, &c. p. 59.

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occasion, to the author of the *first philosophy*, who likewise engaged to *open the eyes of the Public*—He did so; but the only discovery they found themselves able to make, was,—that that they were **NAKED**.

You talk much, Sir, of our philosopher's *gentleness of manners, good nature, compassion, generosity, charity*. Alas, Sir, whither were they all fled when he so often sate down calmly and deliberately to obliterate from the hearts of the human species every trace of the knowlege of **GOD** and his dispensations; all faith in his kind providence, and fatherly protection; all hope of enjoying his grace and favour, here, or hereafter; all love of him, and of their brethren for his sake; all the patience under tribulation, all the comforts, in time of sorrow derived from these fruitful and

perennial sources? Did a good man think himself able, by the force of metaphysic incantation, in a moment, to blot the sun out of heaven, and dry up every fountain upon earth, would he attempt to do it?—TULLY had but a faint glimpse of the country towards which we are all travelling; yet so pleasing was any the most imperfect and shadowy prospect into futurity, that TULLY declared, no man should ravish it from him*. And surely, TULLY was a philosopher, as well as HUME. O had he seen the light which shone upon HUME, he would not have closed his eyes against it; had the same cup been offered to him, he would not have dashed it untasted from him!

* *Quod si in hoc erro, quod animos hominum immortales esse credam, libenter erro; nec mihi hunc errorem, quo delector, dum vivo, extorqueri volo. DE SENECTUTE, ad Fin.*

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“ Perhaps our modern sceptics are
“ ignorant, that without the belief of
“ a GOD, and the hope of immortality,
“ the miseries of human life would
“ often be insupportable. But can I
“ suppose them in a state of total and
“ invincible stupidity, utter strangers
“ to the human heart, and to human
“ affairs? Sure, they would not thank
“ me for such a supposition. Yet this
“ I must suppose, or I must believe
“ them to be the most cruel, the
“ most perfidious, and the most
“ profligate of men. Careless by
“ those who call themselves the great,
“ engrossed by the formalities of life,
“ intoxicated with vanity, pampered
“ with adulation, dissipated in the tu-
“ mult of business, or amidst the vi-
“ cissitudes of folly, they perhaps
“ have little need and little relish for
“ the consolations of religion. But

“ let them know, that in the solitary
“ scenes of life, there is many an
“ honest and tender heart pining
“ with incurable anguish, pierced
“ with the sharpest sting of disap-
“ pointment, bereft of friends, chilled
“ with poverty, racked with disease,
“ scourged by the oppressor, whom
“ nothing but trust in Providence,
“ and the hope of a future retribu-
“ tion could preserve from the ago-
“ nies of despair. And do they, with
“ sacrilegious hands, attempt to vio-
“ late this last refuge of the misera-
“ ble, and to rob them of the only
“ comfort that had survived the ra-
“ vages of misfortune, malice, and
“ tyranny? Did it ever happen, that
“ the influence of their execrable te-
“ nets disturbed the tranquillity of
“ virtuous retirement, deepened the
“ gloom of human distress, or aggra-

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“ vated the horrors of the grave?
“ Is it possible, that this may have
“ happened in many instances? Is it
“ probable, that this hath happened
“ in one single instance?—Ye traytors
“ to human kind, ye murderers of
“ the human soul, how can ye an-
“ swer for it to your own hearts!
“ Surely, every spark of your gene-
“ rosity is extinguished for ever, if
“ this consideration do not awaken in
“ you the keenest remorse, and make
“ you wish in bitterness of soul—But
“ I remonstrate in vain. All this must
“ have often occurred to you, and
“ been as often rejected, as utterly fri-
“ volous. Could I inforce the pre-
“ sent topic by an appeal to your va-
“ nity, I might possibly make some
“ impression. But to plead with you
“ on the principles of BENEVOLENCE,
“ or GENEROSITY, is to address you

“ in a language ye do not, or will not,
“ understand ; and as to the shame of
“ being convicted of absurdity, igno-
“ rance, or want candour, ye have
“ long ago proved yourselves superior
“ to the sense of it.—But let not the
“ lovers of truth be discouraged.
“ Atheism cannot be of long conti-
“ nuance, nor is there much danger
“ of it’s becoming universal. The
“ influence of some conspicuous cha-
“ racters hath brought it too much into
“ fashion ; which, in a thoughtless
“ and profligate age, it is no difficult
“ matter to accomplish. But when
“ men have retrieved the powers of
“ serious reflection, they will find it
“ a frightful phantom ; and the mind
“ will return gladly and eagerly to
“ it’s old endearments. One thing
“ we certainly know ; the fashion of
“ sceptical and metaphysical systems

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“ passeth away. Those unnatural pro-
“ ductions, the vile effusion of a hard
“ and stupid heart, that mistakes it’s
“ own restlessness for the activity of
“ genius, and it’s own captiousness
“ for sagacity of understanding, may,
“ like other monsters, please awhile
“ by their singularity; but the charm
“ is soon over; and the succeeding
“ age will be astonished to hear, that
“ their fore-fathers were deluded,
“ or amused, with such fooleries.”

You, Sir, have read the preceeding paragraph before; but this Letter may come into the hands of many, who have not. It is the alarum bell to the admirers of Mr. HUME; and should be rung in their ears till succeeded by the last trumpet.

And now, Sir, will you give me leave to ask you a few questions? Why all this hurry and bustle, this eagerness to gratify the pretended

“ impatience of the Public *,” and satisfy it, that our philosopher lived and died perfectly composed and easy? Was there, then, any suspicion, in SCOTLAND, that he might not, at times, be quite so composed and easy as he should have been? Was there any particular BOOK ever written against him, that shook his system to pieces about his ears, and reduced it to a heap of ruins, the success and eclat of which might be supposed to have hurt his mind, and to have affected his health? Was there any AUTHOR, whose name his friends never dared to mention before him, and warned all strangers that were introduced to him, against doing it, because he never failed, when by any accident it was done, to fly out into

* Preface to LIFE, &c.

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a transport of passion and swearing *? Was it deemed necessary, or expedient, on this account, that he should represent himself, and that you should represent him, to have been perfectly secure of the growth and increase of his philosophic reputation, as if no book had been written, which had

* "I was a man of mild dispositions, of command of temper, little susceptible of enmity and of great moderation in all my passions. Even my love of literary fame, my ruling passion, never fower'd my temper." LIFE, p. 32. Yet even by what is said of the Reverends and Right Reverends — Bishop WARBURTON, Bishop HURD, the Zealots (that is, the *Christians*) and of the resolution once taken to "change his name and to settle in France," because his writings did not meet with sufficient encouragement—by these circumstances, I say, there seems to have been something of the *irritable* in his constitution. But these are trifles. My quarry lies not this way, at present. I fly at nobler game. The atrocious wickedness of diffusing atheism through the land, is a subject which concerns every body.

impaired it; it having been judged much easier to dissemble the fall of **DAGON** than to *set him upon his stumps again*? I am a *South Briton*, and, consequently, not acquainted with what passes so far in the opposite quarter. You, Sir, can inform us how these things are; and likewise, when the great work of *benevolence* and *charity*, of *wisdom* and *virtue*, shall be crowned by the publication of a treatise designed to prove the **SOUL'S MORTALITY**, and another, to justify and recommend **SELF MURDER**; for which, without doubt, the present and every future age will bless the name of the *gentle* and *amiable* author.

Upon the whole, Doctor, your meaning is good; but I think you will not succeed, this time. You would persuade us, by the example of **DAVID HUME** Esq.; that atheism is

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the only cordial for low spirits, and the proper antidote against the fear of death. But surely, he who can reflect, with complacency, on a friend thus misemploying his talents in his life, and then amusing himself with LUCIAN, WHIST, and CHARON, at his death, may smile over BABYLON in ruins; esteem the earthquake, which destroyed LISBON, an agreeable occurrence; and congratulate the hardened PHARAOH, on his overthrow in the Red sea. Drollery, in such circumstances, is neither more nor less than

Moody madness, laughing wild,

Amid severest woe.

Would we know the baneful and pestilential influences of false philosophy on the human heart? We need only contemplate them in this most deplorable instance of Mr. HUME.

These sayings, Sir, may appear harsh; but they are salutary. And if

departed spirits have any knowledge of what is passing upon earth, that person will be regarded by your friend as rendering him the truest services, who, by energy of expression, and warmth of exhortation, shall most contribute to prevent his writings from producing those effects upon mankind, which he no longer wishes they should produce. Let no man deceive himself or be deceived by others. It is the voice of eternal TRUTH, which crieth aloud, and saith to you, Sir, and to me, and to all the world—*He that believeth on the Son, hath everlasting life; and he that believeth not the Son, shall not see life; but the wrath of God abideth on him* *.

By way of contrast to the behaviour of MR. HUME, at the close of a life, passed without GOD in the world,

* JOHN iii. 36.

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permit me, Sir, to lay before yourself, and the Public, the last sentiments of the truly learned, judicious, and admirable HOOKER, who had spent *bis* days in the service of his Maker and Redeemer.

After this manner, therefore, spake the author of the *Ecclesiastical Polity*, immediately before he expired—

“ I have lived to see, that this
“ world is made up of perturbations ;
“ and I have been long preparing to
“ leave it, and gathering comfort for
“ the dreadful hour of making my
“ account with GOD, which I now
“ apprehend to be near. And though
“ I have, by his grace, loved him in
“ my youth, and feared him in mine
“ age, and laboured to have a con-
“ science void of offence, towards
“ him, and towards all men ; yet, if
“ thou, Lord, shouldest be extreme
“ to mark what I have done amiss,

“ who can abide it? And therefore,
“ where I have failed, Lord, shew
“ mercy to me; for I plead not my
“ righteousness, but the forgiveness
“ of my unrighteousness, through
“ His merits, who died to purchase
“ pardon for penitent sinners. And
“ since I owe thee a death, Lord, let it
“ not be terrible, and then take thine
“ own time; I submit to it. Let not
“ mine, O Lord, but thy will be
“ done!—GOD hath heard my daily
“ petitions; for I am at peace with
“ all men, and he is at peace with
“ me. From such blessed assurance I
“ feel that inward joy, which this
“ world can neither give, nor take
“ from me. My conscience beareth
“ me this witness; and this witness
“ makes the thoughts of death joy-
“ ful. I could wish to live, to do the
“ church more service; but cannot

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“ hope it ; for my days are past, as a
“ shadow that returns not.”

His worthy Biographer adds—
“ More he would have spoken, but
“ his spirits failed him ; and, after a
“ short conflict between nature and
“ death, a quiet sigh put a period to
“ his last breath, and so, he fell asleep
“ —And now he seems to rest like
“ Lazarus in Abraham’s bosom. Let
“ me here draw his curtain, till, with
“ the most glorious company of the
“ Patriarchs and Apostles, and the
“ most noble army of Martyrs and
“ Confessors, this most learned, most
“ humble, most holy man shall also
“ awake to receive an eternal tran-
“ quillity, and with it a greater de-
“ gree of glory, than common Chris-
“ tians shall be made partakers of.”

Doctor SMITH, when the hour of
his departure hence shall arrive, will
copy the example of the BELIEVER, or

the INFIDEL, as it liketh him best. I must freely own, I have no opinion of that reader's *head*, or *heart*, who will not exclaim, as I find myself obliged to do—

*Let me die the death of the Righteous,
and let my last end be like his!*

I am, Sir,

Your very sincere
Well-wisher, and
Humble Servant,
One of the People called CHRISTIANS.

P O S T S C R I P T.

As it is possible, Sir, nay, probable, that this little tract, because it is a little one, may be perused by many, who have not leisure or inclination to go through large volumes, and yet wish to know what Mr. HUME's philosophical system is; I shall here subjoin a short but comprehensive summary

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of the doctrines which compose it, drawn up some few years ago, by a learned gentleman, for his amusement, with proper references to those parts of our philosophers works, where such doctrines were to be found. And though I never heard, the compiler had the thanks of Mr. HUME for so doing, yet neither could I ever find, that he or his friends disputed the fidelity and accuracy with which it was done *.

A SUMMARY OF MR. HUME'S DOCTRINES, METAPHYSICAL AND MORAL.

OF THE SOUL.

That the soul of man is not the same this moment, that it was the last; that we know not what it is; that it is not one, but many things and that it is nothing at all.

* See Dr. BEATTIE's Essay on Truth, Part II. Ch. I. Sect. I, and Part III. Ch. II.

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That in this soul is the agency of all the causes that operate throughout the sensible creation ; and yet that in this soul there is neither power nor agency, nor any idea of either.

That matter and motion may often be regarded as the cause of thought.

OF THE UNIVERSE.

That the external world does not exist, or at least, that it's existence may reasonably be doubted.

That the universe exists in the mind, and that the mind does not exist.

That the universe is nothing but a heap of perceptions, without a substance.

That though a man could bring himself to believe, yea, and have reason to believe, that every thing in the universe proceeds from some cause ; yet it would be unreasonable for him to believe, that the universe itself proceeds from a cause.

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OF HUMAN KNOWLEDGE:

That the perfection of human knowledge is to doubt.

That we ought to doubt of every thing, yea, of our doubts themselves, and therefore, the utmost that philosophy can do, is to give us a doubtful solution of doubtful doubts*.

That the human understanding, acting alone, does entirely subvert itself, and prove by argument, that by argument nothing can be proved.

That man, in all his perceptions, actions and volitions, is a mere passive machine, and has no separate existence of his own, being entirely made up of other things, of the existence of which he is by no means certain; and yet, that the nature of all things de-

* The fourth section of Mr. HUME's *Essays on the Human Understanding*, is called, *Sceptical doubts concerning the operations of the human understanding*; and the fifth section bears this title, *Sceptical solution of those doubts*.

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pends so much upon man, that two and two could not be equal to four, nor fire produce heat, nor the sun light, without an act of the human understanding.

OF GOD.

That it is unreasonable to believe GOD to be infinitely wise and good, while there is any evil or disorder in the universe.

That we have no good reason to think the universe proceeds from a cause.

That as the existence of the external world is questionable, we are at a loss to find arguments by which we may prove the existence of the Supreme Being, or any of his attributes.

That when we speak of Power, as an attribute of any being, GOD himself not excepted, we use words without meaning.

That we can form no idea of power, nor of any being endued with power, *much less* of one endued with infinite power; and that we can never have reason to believe, that any object, or quality of any object exists, of which we cannot form an idea *.

OF THE MORALITY OF HUMAN ACTIONS.

That every human action is necessary, and could not have been different from what it is.

That moral, intellectual, and corporeal virtues are nearly of the same kind—In other words, that to want honesty and to want understanding,

* The poor prodigal Gentile, in the parable, was hardly reduced to feed upon *such husks* as these. How good and how joyful a thing must it be, for one, that has been so reduced, to return to the house of his heavenly Father, where *there is bread enough and to spare*—to know the only true GOD, and JESUS CHRIST, whom he bath sent!

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and to want a leg, are equally the objects of moral disapprobation.

That adultery must be practised, if men would obtain all the advantages of life; that, if generally practised, it would in time cease to be scandalous; and that, if practised secretly and frequently, it would by degrees come to be thought no crime at all.

Lastly, as the soul of man, according to Mr. HUME, becomes every moment a different being, the consequence must be, that the crimes committed by him at one time, cannot be imputable to him at another.*

I believe, Doctor SMITH, the reader is now fully prepared to enter into the spirit of your concluding sentence, which therefore shall be mine.

* " *My Enquiry concerning the Principles of Morals* is of all my writings, historical, philosophical, or literary, incomparably the **BEST.**" LIFE, p. 16.

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“ I have always considered MR.
“ HUME, both in his life-time, and
“ since his death, as approaching as
“ nearly to the idea of a PERFECTLY
“ WISE AND VIRTUOUS MAN, as per-
“ haps the nature of human frailty
“ will permit.”

THE END.

